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FCC MAIL ROOM

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February 21, 1996

The Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear FCC Members:

I am writing in response to your Notice of Inquiry concerning Descriptive Video Service for television programs. I have been totally blind all my life and have found watching television to be a very mixed experience. Programs in which most of the action can be deduced from the dialogue are quite easy for me to enjoy and/or learn from without DVS. However, in most cases I need someone sighted to describe the action or read information that is not spoken in order to get much out of a show. Since such a person is not always available, nor should they have to be, this means that most programs are not fully accessible to me without DVS.

I have limited experience with DVS; it has not been readily available where I have lived. The few times I have watched a movie with DVS, I have been surprised by the amount of detail most films contain. Even if someone is describing the action in a film, s/he is doing it on the spot, with no time to prepare and difficulty knowing which details should be mentioned. Furthermore, by the time it becomes clear that some piece of information should be shared, the actors may be in the middle of a long dialogue which I need to hear. When someone can watch a show, determine what needs to be described, and fit the descriptions into pauses in the dialogue, much more effective and interesting information can be given.

Besides making programs more accessible and entertaining, which is in itself important especially because there will likely be an increasing number of people with visual impairments as America's population ages, DVS could contribute significantly to the educational value of television programs to blind and sighted people alike. Many educational children's shows impart much of their information through visual effects. DVS makes it possible for blind children to obtain this information. I would also think that if a sighted child were to listen to the DVS descriptions while watching such a program, s/he would learn more, since what was seen and heard would reinforce one another. Children who are learning to read and children and adults who have difficulty reading can also benefit from DVS since it enables them to hear any words that appear on the screen. A friend of mine teaches a GED class and showed a DVS version of EYES ON THE PRIZE to her students, all of whom have normal vision. She said they learned much more from this version of the program than they would have from a non-DVS version because when someone spoke, they

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were told who it was. Since those speaking in this film were noted civil rights leaders, it helped the students on many levels to know who was speaking at any given time.

The fact that viewers don't need a screen to follow programs with DVS should be very interesting to advertisers if it is presented properly. It means that people can do housework or other activities while watching television. Even more significant from a marketing standpoint would be the possibility of putting receivers in cars and trucks that would pick up television stations and replace the screen with the Second Audio Program, so that people could "watch" television while driving. The popularity of books on tape among long distance drivers suggests that DVS-EQUIPPED car TV receivers would be used a great deal, thus providing a large market for DVS.

DVS has many possible uses, especially for but by no means limited to people with visual impairments. I don't know what makes the most sense in terms of requiring that it be provided, but here are a few suggestions. When DVS versions of videos exist, this should be noted in stores and catalogs so that people can purchase or rent them. All new televisions should have the capacity to receive DVS just as they currently must be able to receive closed captioning. Public service campaigns should be used to make people aware of the service when it exists. DVS should be added to programs when they are produced so that the version that is distributed is the one containing the descriptions. Broadcasting and cable companies and producers of television programs should be strongly encouraged to describe these shows. The production of car receivers and other means of enlarging the market for DVS should be promoted. Through such means, DVS can be much more widespread so that it can provide all Americans with all the benefits of which it is capable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anna Dresner".

Anna Dresner